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Pertinent Comment

By the Editor

ON THE TEACHING OF HISTORY

THE course of history study prescribed for the elementary schools of Indiana, published by the Department of Public Instruction in the State Manual for 1904-5, should, along with the other contents of that booklet, be of interest, not only to teachers but to parents. It was prepared by a committee from the History section of the State Teachers' Association—Prof. Cyrus W. Hodgkin, Prof. S. B. Harding, Prof. N. C. Heironimus, Supt. Adelaide S. Baylor and Supt. George H. Tapy. A brief outline here of their plan is in place.

The First Year is to be devoted almost wholly to object lessons, to story and to familiar things, beginning with a study of local surroundings, both social and geographical. Indian and pioneer relics may be brought to the school room and their interest enhanced by narratives of Indian and pioneer life. In the study of local geography the pupil's attention is to be guided to the fact that hills, forests, rivers, etc., offer advantages, and originally induced people to live in their locality. Food, clothing and ways of living of both the Indians and white men are to be studied, and the latter part of this year is to be given to stories of notable American pioneers.

The Second Year begins with an introduction to other famous Americans, from George Washington to Francis Key; then takes up Norse life in story form, and Norse legends and beliefs. In this transition across the sea foreign children in the school, if there be such, are to be utilized in bringing out the idea of foreign lands and other peoples. The larger part of the second year is to be given to this. The Third Year compasses a similar study of Hebrew and Greek life and heroes, and of the Greek myths. The Fourth Year takes up Rome, and this year the course follows more closely the sequence of events, though still by the story method. The Fifth Year injects, in a measure, philosophy into the study, and deals mainly with historical personages as determined by environment and as, in turn, affecting events; the period being that of the great maritime activity in European history between 1453 and 1618, the French and Revolutionary wars in America, and the middle period of United States history. The Sixth Year is devoted entirely to England. The Seventh and Eighth Years are given to

the United States. For each year a list of books is given to be used as supplementary to the course, besides the suggestions as to the utilizing of relics and familiar objects, and the whole plan, evidently, contemplates emancipation from the time-honored, cut-and-dried text-book that has been the detestation of many a pupil.

Introductory to the course as thus arranged by the teachers' committee is a disquisition setting forth a theory of history and stating what should be the view-point and aims of the teacher of this subject in the elementary schools. "History," it is said, "is the growing life of humanity. * * The subject of history, then, is the human race and its development, and the purpose of teaching it should be to lead the child to a broad view of the historic movement, so that he may see many ages, many civilizations, many stages of the growth, and to be able to compare and contrast one with another, and thus get a picture of all the struggles and triumphs of men in elevating humanity." History, it is said, is essentially the history of institutions; the institutions of society "do not exist for themselves; they are only means to an end. That end is the freedom of man." Finally, biography is but subsidiary to history, and in teaching it the teacher should bear in mind that the object is "not that the child may learn about isolated individual men but to see movements of society through the lives of these men."



Now, the nature and uses of history, its importance in the sum total of one's education, from which end it shall be approached as a study, the psychology of its acquiring, etc., are all mooted questions. Eminent scholars have discussed them searchingly. Eminent scholars, like doctors, have also disagreed, and it follows that any course prescribed must be, in a measure, experimental, and any theory should be propounded tentatively—certainly not as a finality, even in a system of positive instruction such as teachers and pupils are supposed to be subjected to. Both course and theory should expect rigid examination.

What we shall have to say about the present Indiana course will be commendatory rather than critical. It seems to us to have been the outcome of both thought and experience, and recognizes at once the difficulties of creating an intelligent attitude toward history and the natural avenues to the juvenile mind. Its successful application, however, depends much upon a preparation more thorough

than can reasonably be expected of teachers who have to deal with a multitude of things, and until the branch has its special teachers as certain branches now have in the larger centers, the plan of the course will be hampered. The authors of this course evidently subscribe to the belief that the true educational method in history is from the known to the unknown, from the familiar to the remote. Just how far this idea is adopted by the public school systems of the country we do not know, but there has been and is opposition to it. The argument, in brief, is that the small segment of the near and familiar is so related to antecedents that these antecedents must be traced before anything like an adequate conception can be had of more immediate conditions. The State is not comprehensible until led up to by a preparatory knowledge of the nation; United States history is meaningless unless explained by its forerunners, English and ancient history. This argument, like some others that are time-honored, does not seem to be conclusive. By the same parity of reasoning the antecedent histories insisted upon are meaningless unless viewed in the light of more remote antecedents, and that involves us in hopelessness, because beyond all recorded history lies the unrecorded ages where are buried the real roots of things that are. The truth seems to be that there is no logical starting-point for historical study. The utmost we can do is to fix upon a unit (whether it be a single State or all the records of the nations) that, in a manner, stands complete and which, within limits, explains its own nature, as all things do by the syntheses they present. We may choose an immensely large and complex unit, and feel our way, very much in the dark and but dimly knowing what we are after, from the outer margin inward, or we may take a unit that comes somewhat within the comprehension, and which has the very important advantage of engaging the interest at the start, and, as the conception of it enlarges by study, reach out farther and farther into the great sphere of causes and relations, with the lamp of ever increasing enlightenment guiding the way. To us it seems that the latter is by far the more hopeful method. We venture the belief that in a long and completed course the pupil by this method will gain quite as broad a comprehension of history and its meanings as by the attempt to lay the broad foundation at the start; while in the many instances where but limited time is given to the subject, he will, in the first instance, be enlight-

ened just so far as he goes, while in the other case he will, perhaps, have gained but a fragment of a "foundation," which will be of as much use as foundations usually are without a super-structure. However, this is but our theory, and maybe we are quite wrong.



With the theory of history above quoted from the Manual we dissent, and we dissent the more decidedly because it is presented, not as a discussable opinion, but as authoritative statement from which, supposedly, teachers are to take their view-point and to teach accordingly. A theory which aims to have so wide an influence as this, and which is helped on its way by authority, aside from its intrinsic merit, certainly ought to stand close scrutiny. We do not think that this one does. In its definitions of history and the aims of historical study much, it seems to us, is left out of the survey. History is not alone the "growing life of humanity;" it is everything of importance that has ever been recorded in the experience of man; and the aim of its study is not alone to appreciate the grand spectacle of historic movements but to learn whatever of importance has happened within the experience of man. Among those happenings has been decadence as well as growth—the power within ourselves that made for wrong as well as the power not ourselves that makes for righteousness, and to take cognizance of the diseases engendered by man in the body politic is, it may be held, of quite as much importance as contemplating the more pleasing manifestations. To interpret history wholly in terms of grand progressive laws, however desirable an exercise that may seem to be for the school room, reminds one of Emerson's Providence dressed up "in a clean shirt and white neckcloth," whereas Providence in history has, to quote the sage again, "a wild, rough, incalculable road to its end," and sometimes is far from lovely. The contemplation of the historic processes is something other than cultural in the literary or esthetic sense. The very center of interest, we take it, is the place of man as a determining agent, and particularly as a corrective force in the great march of events. To ignore this is much as if a physician should make a study of anatomy and physiological functions in their ideal forms and pay no attention to the science of conserving and restoring health. The decline and fall of the Roman Empire and the causes thereof have in them lessons

among the most important of all history, and on the theory that man is a determining factor in his own fortunes it surely behooves him to know such lessons well.

Again, history is but the history of institutions, says the Manual in substance. Institutions "do not exist for themselves; they are only means to an end. That end is the freedom of man." Hence the study of history is a study of the freeing of man. That, we fear, is more transcendental than true—it sounds better than it is. To say that an institution is but a means to an end (impliedly an extraneous means) is analogous to the assumption, so frequently made, that work is but a means to an end—which is, the enjoyment of the fruits of work. And yet those who have no work but have a super-abundance of the fruits of work, as the idle rich, are among the most discontented of people. We would submit as a truer proposition that work, performance, the bringing to pass, the creating of new forms, is for its own sake a requirement of human existence, and that institutions, which are necessary forms taken by work, represent a natural activity so incorporated with man's welfare that to say they are merely means, or in any sense extraneous, is meaningless. Then as to man's freedom—to what extent is that true? The mastery of man, collectively, over nature—"freeing himself from the limitations of time and space," as it is put, is but a small arc in the full circle of freedom. With increasing obligations that come with advancing civilization the individual is shorn of much of the freedom that goes with the more primitive life—the rights of others necessarily become more binding. If, on the one hand, there is an advance toward political freedom, on the other there is a corresponding movement not only toward social restrictions but in the direction of industrial slavery. Out of the power of capital issue systems wherein the bread-earner, as never before, is held like a beast in a tread-mill. Out of the power of labor organizations issue demands, as never before, that seem to strike at the very roots of our ideas of freedom. In the face of all this, to say that the study of history is a study of the freeing of man is somewhat incomprehensible.

Finally, exception may be taken to the Manual's theory of biography and the assertion that the great personage is chiefly of interest as he is the center of a historical movement and an instrument

to elucidate that movement by. If there are streams or aggregates of force there are also units of force, and it is quite permissible to hold that to the unit for its own sake attaches a very keen interest. Where man is the unit this is particularly true, for personality and its mysteries—the possibility of the individual, always has been and always will be, in its own right, of supreme human interest. This fact remains true however much the individual is carried along by the general stream, and in our daily life, wherever we come into touch with a really strong personality, we realize it. Had Washington or Lincoln been stricken out of their respective periods the movements in which they have figured would have gone on—history would still have been made, but it would have been changed more than we can realize. In studying these men biographically the influences they exerted, the qualities they revealed, the native power residing within them that welled up under the stress of circumstances, is the very center of interest, and the attempt to transfer that interest to something, however large, outside of them, is, it seems to us, to wholly misapprehend the real character of biography as distinguished from history proper. It is Carlyle, we believe, who somewhere speaks of man as “the most interesting little fellow on the planet,” and Carlyle is not yet quite out of court, though some of us at the present day like to lose ourselves in the immensity of the universal.

An Old-Time Pleasantry

He:

How comes it, this delightful weather,
That U and I can't dine together?

She:

My worthy friend, it cannot be—
U cannot come till after T.